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Aboriginal education a top priority (06/11/29)

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OTTAWA (CNB) - The provincial and federal governments have taken the first step in a relationship-building process to involve First Nations in addressing important issues affecting aboriginal people.

Minister of Post-Secondary Education, Training and Labour Ed Doherty, who is also minister responsible for aboriginal affairs, met with Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development Jim Prentice, who is also federal interlocutor for Métis and non-status Indians, in Ottawa on Monday, Nov. 27.

"The Province of New Brunswick is committed to working through a tripartite process that creates a framework agreement guiding the province to positive negotiations," Doherty said.

The key issues emerging from the meeting included education of aboriginals living on and off reserves, health care, and economic development. Finding equitable resolutions to these issues will require a collaborative effort from all stakeholders, based on a strong, positive relationship.

"Following my recent meetings with New Brunswick chiefs and leaders of aboriginal organizations, my meeting with Minister Prentice was very timely," Doherty said. "We have agreed to move forward on these three key issues, and our approach to addressing all related issues will involve First Nations leaders as well as both levels of government."

Doherty is hopeful that a relationship protocol between the First Nations and provincial and federal governments can be developed and agreed upon by early 2007.

Doherty is currently attending the Aboriginal Health Summit in Vancouver, B.C., on behalf of Premier Shawn Graham and the province. One of his main objectives is to identify mechanisms that could lead to reducing the existing health-care gap between aboriginals and other New Brunswickers.

"The work done leading up to the Kelowna meeting in November 2005 identified several significant advances that would lead to making great strides in health care and the education of aboriginal people in New Brunswick," Doherty said. "It is my hope that we can rekindle the flame lit during the Kelowna process."

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MEDIA CONTACT: Nichole Bowman, Aboriginal Affairs Secretariat, 506-444-4194.

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